

Conflict Resolution

8 March 2023, 1-230pm & 3-430pm

Class Description

Conflict is inevitable in our post-Fall, pre-Glorification world. This class aims to equip students with a basic biblical framework to understand and engage conflicts in a godly loving way that won't undermine the gospel and our ministry.

Learning Goals

- To equip students with a biblical framework to understand the dynamics of interpersonal conflicts.
- To deepen students' awareness of their default conflict strategy.
- To introduce students to mediation and conflict resolution skills.
- To introduce students to dynamics of marital conflicts and marriage counselling.

Required Reading (in class)

- C. John Miller, *Letters from Jack Miller: The Heart of a Servant Leader* (P&R Publishing, 2004)

Optional/Recommended Reading

- Brian Noble, *The Path of a Peacemaker: Your Biblical Guide to Healthy Relationships, Conflict Resolution, and a Life of Peace* (Baker Books, 2019)
- Ken Sande & Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Baker Books, 2011)
- Eric Willis, *Sacred Conflict: Resolution Skills for the Follower of Christ* (Westbow Press, 2018)
- Lane & Tripp, *Relationship: A Mess Worth Making* (New Growth Press, 2006)
- Aaron Sironi & Lauren Whitman, *Helping a Spouse Who Moves Against during Marital Conflict* in JBC 32:3 (2018): 12–34
- Aaron Sironi & Lauren Whitman, *Helping a Spouse Who Withdraws during Marital Conflict* in JBC 32:3 (2018): 12–34
- Steve Midgley, *Conflict in Corinth: A Surprising Way to Build a Community* in JBC 28:2 (2014): 70-78
- David Powlison, *Getting to the Heart of Conflict* in JBC 16:1 (1997): 32-42
- David Powlison, *Picturing the Heart of Conflict* in JBC 16:1 (1997): 43-46

Response Paper

- Reflect on your default personal conflict strategy, and how you would bring your weakness before God for your growth and the good of others.
- Reflect on the way Miller sought to help resolve the conflict. What about Miller's approach that you are comfortable or not comfortable with? What would you have said or done?

Class Outline

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<<Conflict Scenarios>>

- a) Describe a conflict you are currently involved in or know of.
- b) “You know, I had such high hopes for our friendship. What went wrong? What happened? I thought I had finally found someone I could trust. But.”
- c) “I can't believe you're questioning my integrity after all the things I have done for you. It's not like I'm the only one who has failed in this relationship. You've hurt me too.”
- d) “You see, this is what you always do. I come to you and you turn the table on me. You are so good at making other people feel guilty for your failures! The problem with you is that you are much better at recognizing other people's faults than your own. You don't have a clue how much you have hurt me. You betrayed our trust when you told them what I said.”
- e) “You never told me I couldn't share anything about what you are shared with me. I didn't know you would be so sensitive about it.”
- f) “I thought you cared enough for me that I wouldn't have to tell you not to talk to someone else I thought our relationship was as important to you as it is to me.”
- g) “Why does it always go here? We can't even have a discussion about weather without ending in accusation.”

1. A Biblical Framework

- i. Post-Fall World (Gn.4:6-8, 6:5-6, 37:18-20)
- ii. What causes quarrel (Js.4:1-4)
- iii. First take out the log in your own eye (Mt.7:3-5)
- iv. If your brother sins against you (Mt.18:15-18)
- v. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Ep.4:32, Col.3:13, Mt.6:12)
- vi. Sin, Confession, Repentance & Forgiveness (James 4:4-10, 1John1:8-9)

<<Conflict Video: Black Widow & Kylo Ren>>

2. Growing in Self-Awareness: My Conflict Strategy

- i. Six Ways We Sin
- ii. The Slippery Slope - Escape, Attack, Make Peace
- iii. What tend to produce conflict in your life:
 - Comfort.** I want, must have, and serve comfort and you'd better not get in the way of me getting it! I fear hard work.
 - Pleasure.** I want, must have, and deserve pleasure and you'd better give it to me! I fear pain.
 - Recognition.** I want, must have, and deserve recognition or I will be devastated. I fear being overlooked.
 - Power.** I want, must have, and deserve power and you'd better to what I say! I fear being told what to do.
 - Control.** I want, must have, and deserve control and you will feel the brunt of my disappointment if you mess up my tidy little universe! I fear unpredictability.
 - Acceptance.** I want, must have, and deserve acceptance and you are responsible to give it to me. I fear rejection.
- iv. My Family of Origin's Strategies (conflicts in your family growing up):
 - How did your family managed conflict?
 - What were the unspoken rules?
 - What are the typical ways to resolve problems?
 - Were there regular patterns of forgiveness?
 - Have you witnessed forgiveness sought or granted?
 - How did you normally communicate?
 - Who typically have the say?
 - Was your family loud or quiet?
 - What was dinner conversation like?
 - Were there taboo topics? Things you've know you can't share?
 - How was anger expressed?
 - What was done to keep family relationally strong amidst busyness?
 - Were people motivated positively or with threats and guilt?
 - Was living at home relaxing or walking on eggshells?
 - How was service one another modeled and encouraged?
 - Which values of your family have become your values?
 - Which struggles of your family have become your struggles?
- v. My Growth in Conflict Resolution
<<Conflict Video: Workplace>>

3. Mediation & Conflict Resolution Resources

- i. Sande's Mini-book: Resolving Everyday Conflict
- ii. Powlison's Article: Let me Draw a Picture
- iii. Noble's Four Steps: Story, Ascend, Reflect, Connect
- iv. Sironi & Whitman's Conflict Diagram

<<Conflict Video: Kitchen>>

4. Dynamics of Marital Conflicts

- i. Spouse who Withdraws / who Moves Against
- ii. Gottman's 4 Horsemen of Apocalypse

**C. John Miller, *Letters from Jack Miller:*
The Heart of a Servant Leader (P&R Publishing, 2004)**

THE HEART OF A SERVANT LEADER

The Central Conflict: Belief or Unbelief

To a young man who is struggling in his relationship with his girlfriend and with how the elders at NLPC have tried to shepherd him through his struggle.



October, 1988

Dear Steve,

Warm greetings in the name of Christ!

Since I was away the previous Sunday and you were away this past Sunday, I did not get an opportunity to see you. My hope is that you were able to meet with George [a NLPC elder] for prayer. He is a brother who prays with real faith. I will also be contacting [a few other elders] to pray for you. I also have prayed for you. All these brothers will be praying for you with deep concern for you.

Were you able to get the sermon tape of Peter's [one of Jack's copastors at NLPC] that I recommended? One of the brothers in the church told me that particular sermon was a great help to him. He said, "I've just been full of myself and my problems, but what a relief to see that being full of myself can be cured by grace, because Christ had resisted temptation for me!" He went on to say how liberating it was to know that a spotless Christ has atoned for his sins of self-preoccupation and had defeated Satan's accusations against his conscience. He had fear and trembling knowing his weaknesses, but this brother had been taught by God that Jesus lives in us by His Spirit and can enable us to take a stand against evil.

When I am weak in myself, then I am strong in grace. It has taken me a lifetime to get a little knowledge of myself, and what I have has all come the hard way. When I come to the end of myself, then and often only then I want and receive grace to understand myself and people. I wish I had a heart that did not constantly need all the hard spots in it to be

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crushed by steam-roller experiences.

But let me recall our conversation of a few weeks ago when you showed up at my study. Thanks for coming and sticking it out! Thanks too for forgiving me and the other elders for our many failings as shepherds. We always need lots of forgiveness and also your prayers. Our failure to help you at least proves one thing: we do not have the power to deliver you. No human being does.

Only Christ, only Christ, only Christ delivers.

It must also have been very difficult to wrestle with all the questions you and I were asking together. Believe me, I stress “together.” Just remember that all of us elders are weak and sinful; we are, with Paul, “chief of sinners.” Anyway, do you remember how you and I differed in our evaluation of you? It makes me smile to think about it. You saw yourself as too trusting, and I saw you as overly suspicious of people.

I didn’t mean to single you out as having a problem that we as leaders don’t also have. All I was doing was talking out of my experience of my own foolish way of doing things. I do not instinctively seek out people who may tell me what I do not want to hear about myself. We all have a frightening tendency to avoid and draw back from people of wisdom who really know us—at least to draw back when they may tell us something that threatens our image of our inner self as righteous.

So I am praying for myself—and for you—that we will not be afraid or suspicious of wise people. My plea for you is that you will seek out and listen to others. . . . [Here Jack mentions a few people that he would like Steve to talk with.]

I’d also like to share with you a few thoughts in this letter about God’s method of healing the life and the conscience. In your recent telephone call you mentioned you simply could not pray, calling God “father.” That must break your heart! Earlier I believe you spoke of your need to deal with the guilt which has clouded your life since you committed a particular sin. I believe you also mentioned that you struggled with

thinking negatively about other people and judging them. Is it possible that this negative chemistry relates to your inability to pray? Negativism kills praying or at least converts praying into a form of penance which is powerless with God.

Usually our negativism is rooted in our feeling superior to people and rejecting the government of God over our lives. This self-righteous pride leads us into deep disappointment with everyone, and how can we pray when we really don't like God's form of government and the way other sinners have treated us?

I think it's important that you know we all struggle with these humbling issues: burdens of guilt and a tendency to feel condemned and then to condemn and fight others in our hearts.

The Devil also gets involved. He is a hard-hitter and refuses to quit at the sound of the bell. He is a relentless accuser of the brethren, and wants us to accuse ourselves as hopeless cases and to do the same for others. Then we are inwardly condemned and inwardly condemning.

In your life the struggle also seems to me to take the form of fight and flight. Would you agree? Think about it. I have found the same thing in myself. A tendency to fight people or problems and then run away from them by seeking some quick form of relief or comfort—or just distancing myself from people. Another form of flight is just going from one counselor to another—or rejecting all spiritual guidance.

It appears to me that you have a fundamental choice: will you approach these struggles with belief or with unbelief?

This is the central conflict for you. Belief or unbelief. Life or death.

Which will it be?

Allied to that conflict is the struggle on your part to be honest. I believe I sense in you a desire for integrity. Well, the two battles go together. Where there is faith in Christ

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and the atoning power of His blood, there is the courage to be honest and to confess and forsake sins. Particular sins. Do you think perhaps that your inability to pray indicates that your conscience is troubled by something you may have suppressed?

Believe me, you didn't invent all this. I have learned this about myself: Where unbelief has been allowed to take over, then the name of the game is insincerity and self-deception.

I would commend to you a careful and constant reading of James 4 and Isaiah 53. The former passage deals with God and our evil desires; the latter passage presents the work of Christ which gives us the security to face up to the evil of our hearts without being destroyed by it.

Steve, we elders are so very concerned for you. Please heed our loving admonition. Get a heart for the gospel and the holiness which comes from the gospel. Then reckon—think, consider, know, yes, believe, that you are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Then present your members as weapons of your true and only Lord, to be used in His war with evil! Hate sin for His dear sake!

Pray that Christ will show you the Father and His love. Join that prayer with honesty in the following: no blame-shifting or excuse-making or defending yourself in your heart and with your tongue.

Go constantly to Christ; look to Christ, rely on Christ, think Christ; and as you do this, the blood of the Son of God will cleanse you of these sins. Be very specific in your confession of sins and claim a great promise like Isaiah 1:18. I know big sinners like me need big promises like this one! Actually, seeking out giant promises will lead to a giant faith!

Jesus loves you, and so do we who are your spiritual shepherds. Expect great things from Christ.

**C. John Miller, *Letters from Jack Miller:*
The Heart of a Servant Leader (P&R Publishing, 2004)**

THE HEART OF A SERVANT LEAD

Fear and Egocentricity Go Together

To a woman who Jack and Rose Marie met on the mission field. She struggles with paralyzing fear and angry outbursts.



November, 1988

Dear Mary,

Tomorrow we leave for home with hearts that are both glad and sad. It makes us happy to be returning to our dear family and church, but we are sorry to leave so many fine friends here. We have learned to love this country and pray for Christ to do a mighty work here.

Rose Marie and I have tender hearts toward you and the pains which you have undergone in your life. We are especially burdened to see Christ deliver you from your fears. Fear is a terrible master, and the devil uses it to blind us to the love of God in Christ and the goodness of God's sovereign rule.

But you know, there is an even more powerful cause of our enslavements. It is our unconscious pride. Let me explain.

When I was sick with cancer, sometimes things would go wrong, complications or bodily weaknesses breaking down my peace of mind. Fear would seem to get an iron grip on my emotions. It was very, very hard.

But I did learn something. It is that fear is rooted in our need to be in control of our lives. And sickness and death are such a threat to us because they threaten to undo our pretensions to be sovereign over our own lives.

Once I saw this truth I told my heavenly Father that my fears were deep and that they were rooted in my ego-centered pride. God loves the truth, Mary; there is no point in trying to hide the deep sins of our heart from Him. He knows it all anyway, but He does

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want us to acknowledge our sins and to fall from our thrones onto our faces before Him.

Mary, I marvel how God should love me so much that He would send His Son to atone for my sins and to dethrone me. But I have learned there is no security, only fear and dread on a shaky throne of pride.

How does this relate to your fear and disappointments? Please know that—

1. You can't run away from your fears. You must ask the Father to help you identify them and hand them over to Him.
2. You must ask God to give you the Spirit to understand yourself and how your fears are rooted in egocentric pride.
3. Then humble your heart and repent of your proud spirit, grieve over it, hate it, and despise it.
4. Then claim the blood of Christ as the sole basis for cleansing, relying on the promise of 1 John 1:7–2:2.

It appears to me that you will have trouble understanding the connection between ungovernable fears and egocentricity. This insight can only be understood by faith. By faith you need to see how any attempt by us to run our lives without humble submission to God puts us in a position of having to control the uncontrollable. Who really can control his or her own life?—the people in it?—the events, joyous and painful, that occur?—the deep disappointments when others do not meet our expectations?

Indeed, you can end up hating God for not being the guarantor of our own idea of our rights and prerogatives.

But, Mary, you must by faith recognize the painful and liberating truth that you are not God, but a creature made in God's image, a person with dignity, but nonetheless a very, very small being compared to the infinite Majesty of the Most High. I know that when God revealed Himself to me, I was stunned to discover that He was the all-glorious one

and that I was the most egocentric person who had ever lived. What helped me see this shocking truth about myself? It was His waking me up to the knowledge that my whole life was exclusively centered on my own glory, my own needs, and my own will.

It hurts me to have to say this, and I speak with all love in Christ. But it appears to me that you suffer from my evil self-centeredness, and evil egomania that is a betrayal of God and a denial of your humble creaturehood. Can you pray and ask God the Father to show you if I am right? Pray, Mary, for an honest heart.

With all tenderness in Christ, let me also point out how your self-centeredness manifests itself. When you were with us on Sunday and we had just finished hearing a message on repentance and personal sanity, you called your son-in-law a "swine." I was shocked, and so was everyone else. Your tone also seemed so bitter that I wondered whether you really had heard anything of the ministry of the Word and Spirit.

In company you are also so preoccupied with yourself and your own problems that you can give offence to people without knowing you are doing so. You have an opinion on everything, and you quickly express it without any regard for the feelings of others. For example, you put Nate [Mary's husband] down, interrupt him, and seem to assume he has no feelings at all.

I also believe that you talk down to people from a standpoint of superiority, and I have also seen you attack them or at least show a condemnatory attitude toward others. You feel condemned and you condemn others. From all I can see, you cannot forgive yourself and you do not seem to have forgiven your father and your son-in-law.

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Dear friend, none of us are born innocent and all need forgiveness. We are all desperately wicked sinners and need so much mercy that we should be ready to extend it to others. “Father, grant such mercy to me that I may show it to everyone else.”

I cannot save you, Rose Marie cannot save you, Nate cannot save you. But Jesus—Oh, that is another matter! He is ready to save poor sinners and how I pray He will show you your deepest need—to know the power of His blood and righteousness to save you from the hell of your own anger and bitterness.

Rose Marie and I are praying for you to meet with Jesus. We know that He is the omnipotent Son of God having a powerful salvation. Ask Him to open your eyes to see it and appropriate it as the poor beggar takes hold of bread. Eat of Jesus and you will live. You are in our hearts and I speak out of great compassion.

Grace flows downhill. It runs down from the heights of God to the humble at the foot of the mountain. Grace also takes away fear and reveals the mighty, tender, compassionate securities of God. As you humble yourself, you will find fears fading away like the morning mists. Believe, only believe.

Much love,
Jack Miller

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Lane & Tripp, *Relationship: A Mess Worth Making* (New Growth Press, 2006)

	Seeks / Wants	Acceptable Cost	Nightmare / Fear	Others' Experience	Telltale Emotion / Action
Self-Centeredness	Attention, approval	Will sacrifice control and independence	Rejection, not being recognized or affirmed	Others feel used, minimized, smothered	Anxious, needy
Self-Rule	To be right, in control	Will sacrifice intimacy and unity	Being seen as wrong, being dependent	Others feel coerced, manipulated	Angry
Self-Sufficiency	Independence, time alone	Will sacrifice intimacy, mutually helpful community	The dependence and neediness of others	Others feel ignored, unappreciated	Cold, distant
Self-Righteousness	Being right in the eyes of others	Will sacrifice relationships that challenge or confront	Being wrong, guilty, or condemned	Others feel challenged, condemned, or dismissed	Aggressive, argumentative
Self-Satisfaction	Pleasure (self-defined)	Will sacrifice community if inconvenient	Others interfering with personal pleasure	Others feel like objects, not companions	Controlling, demanding, dissatisfied
Self-Taught	A platform for one's own opinion	Will sacrifice growing together if you disagree	Being told what to think, say, and do	Others feel patronized, disrespected	Opinionated, domineering

Ken Sande & Kevin Johnson,
Resolving Everyday Conflict (Baker Books, 2011)



Aaron Sironi & Lauren Whitman, *Helping a Spouse Who Moves Against during Marital Conflict* in JBC 32:3 (2018): 12–34

Figure 1

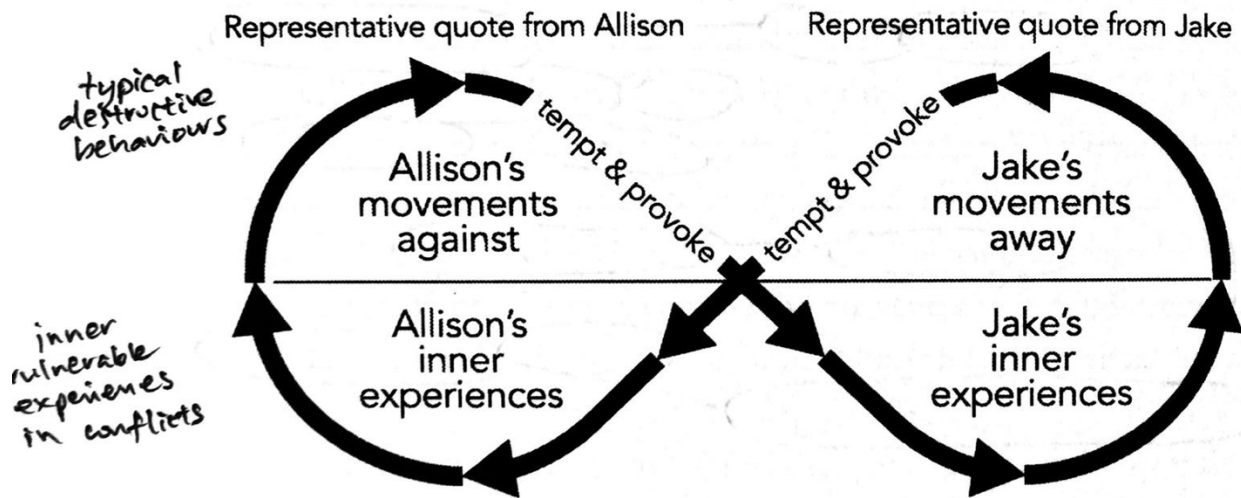
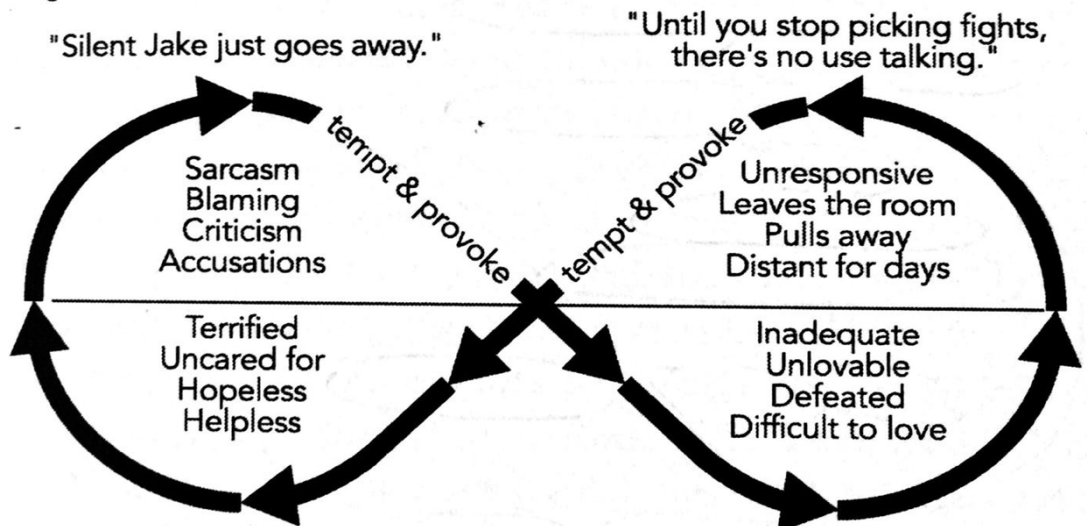


Figure 2



Ken Sande

*The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to
Resolving Personal Conflict* (Baker Books, 2004)

CONCLUSION

The Peacemaker's Pledge

Peachmaking can involve a wide variety of activities, all of which may be summarized in four basic principles drawn directly from Scripture. Taken together, these principles could be called “The Peacemaker’s Pledge.”

The Peacemaker’s Pledge

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict (Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:27–36; Gal. 5:19–26). We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ (Rom. 8:28–29; 1 Cor. 10:31–11:1; James 1:2–4). Therefore, in response to God’s love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to responding to conflict according to the following principles.

Glorify God

Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by

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depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Ps. 37:1–6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Rom. 12:17–21; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 4:2–9; Col. 3:1–4; James 3:17–18; 4:1–3; 1 Peter 2:12).

Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye

Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Prov. 28:13; Matt. 7:3–5; Luke 19:8; Col. 3:5–14; 1 John 1:8–9).

Gently Restore

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Prov. 19:11; Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 6:1–8; Gal. 6:1–2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24–26; James 5:9).

Go and Be Reconciled

Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matt. 5:23–24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1–3, 32; Phil. 2:3–4).

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter

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of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know his infinite love (Matt. 25:14–21; John 13:34–35; Rom. 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19; 4:19).
